DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 227 FL 016 359

AUTHOR Berns, Margie S.
TITLE Functional Approaches to Language and Language Teaching: Another Look.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 20p.; In: Savignon, Sandra J., Ed. and Berns, Margie S., Ed. Communicative Language Teaching: Where Are We Going? Urbana, Language Learning Laboratory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1983; see FL 016 358. Sample exercises contain small print.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Journal Articles (080)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Communicative Competence (Languages); Correlation; *Instructional Materials; Language Research; Language Usage; *Linguistic Theory; Material Development; *Notional Functional Syllabi; Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the functional approach to second language teaching looks at its theoretical foundations and their relationship to communicative language instruction. It locates the origins of the functional approach in early twentieth-century British linguistics and the three key concepts of context of situation, language function, and meaning potential. It examines the applications of systemic theory and relates them to the development of the notional syllabus and accompanying materials. The discussion concludes with an examination of the viability of functional materials in promoting communicative competence. Five sample exercises and 33 references are included. (MSE)

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Studies in Language Learning (1983), 4, 4-22.

ED278227

FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE TEACHING: ANOTHER LOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Communicative language teaching, or the teaching of language for communication, has been the center of language teaching discussions for the last decade or so. Dozens of books, journal articles and conference papers, in addition to an array of teaching materials, have been written under the banner of this movement. Communicative language teaching has grown out of the realization that mastery of grammatical forms and structures does not adequately prepare learners to use the language they are learning effectively and appropriately when communicating with others.

The functional approach to language teaching is intimately related to the communicative approach and in recent years has enjoyed widespread popularity. There was optimism initially about the promise of functional language teaching to overcome the inadequacies of largely structural course materials, and publishers and textbook writers were quick to respond with so-called functional materials.

While *functional approach* was largely understood as a cover term for the underlying concept that language is used for communication, and most interpretations emphasized the communicative needs of learners and explicit presentation of language functions and the linguistic forms associated with them, there was no standard interpretation of the terms *function*, *notion*, or *communication*. For some a function was as general as "describing a person or place" or "describing mechanical processes"; for others it was as specific as "requesting help with baggage" or "answering questions about what people have been doing." The multiple usages of the terms *functional/notional*, *communicative functions*, and *communicative notions* reflected and also contributed to uncertainty as to precise meanings on the part of textbook writers, publishers and educational administrators, not all of whom were aware of these terms in their more original and restricted meanings.

This uncertainty and lack of uniformity often resulted in materials that are neither functional nor communicative. In one instance the selection of a particular set of materials meant beginning with grammar and delaying any introduction to the functions of language until later in the course. In another, communicative functions were taught from the very beginning with no systematic treatment of grammar or consideration of context. The net result of such divergent interpretations of the functional approach to language teaching has been disappointment and frustration on the part of teachers who wanted to respond to their learners' needs but discovered that functional materials could not keep the promises their supporters had made for them (Sutton and von Baeyer 1978).

Another look at the theoretical foundations of functional approaches and their relationship to communicative language teaching will help to resolve this confusion about the terms and concepts they have introduced into discussions of second-language learning and teaching, and, in so doing, suggest a more coherent, reasoned application to materials development.

Such a review properly begins with a summary of the linguistic tradition from which this approach grew, the long tradition which is that of the British school of linguistics. Following this summary, we will look at applied linguistics

research within the tradition and, subsequently, teaching materials and exercises based on this research. An assessment of the viability of these materials and their linguistic bases concludes the review.

THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The functional approach to language can be identified with the linguistic tradition of Sweet (1899), Jones (1917, 1918) and Firth. This tradition is variously referred to as British linguistics, the London School, or Firthian linguistics, none of which, however, are precise labels.

This tradition has flourished not only within Britain but also in various contexts outside of Britain. For example, it has influenced linguistic study in Canada (Gregory and Carroll 1978), and in Germany where it is known as "British contextualism" (Geiger 1981). However, it is little known in the United States, where Chomskyan transformational linguistics has dominated linguistic inquiry during the last twenty years, preceded by the earlier dominance of American structuralism.[2]

In essence, a functional approach to language is based on an interest in performance, or actual language *use*. It is thus in decided contrast with the Chomskyan concern with the linguistic competence of the ideal speaker-hearer (Chomsky 1965). J.R. Firth the founder of the British school, viewed language as "a way of behaving and making others behave" (1951). Language in the Firthian view is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. In this light, language study then has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both its linguistic context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social, or situational, context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak).

If we accept this Firthian view of language, three concepts that are part of this linguistic tradition become useful as a reference point in the development and evaluation of language teaching materials.

The first is *context of situation*. Firth used this construct, which became an important part of his view, to frame the analysis of language events in the social context. He did not create the term but borrowed it from Bronislaw Malinowski (1923, 1935), an anthropologist, who shared Firth's view of language as a mode of human behavior. Malinowski held that if language is active, it is most appropriately studied as part of activity, an approach he illustrated in

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[2]American structuralism differs from the European structuralist tradition. In the United States the term is used with special reference to Bloomfield's emphasis on segmenting and classifying physical features of an utterance. British "structuralism" on the other hand is interested in finding social explanations for the structures that are used by speakers.

his own study of the Trobriand Islanders. Malinowski used the term context of situation to designate the physical environment in which a linguistic activity is performed. It proved particularly useful to him as a procedural concept in solving problems of equivalence in the translation of texts from the Trobriand Islands into comprehensible English.

In borrowing the term, Firth interpreted it more abstractly than Malinowski. He used it to refer to general situation types, the features of which are established by a set of broad and general categories

A. The relevant features of participants; persons, personalities

   (i) Verbal actions of participants
   (ii) Non-verbal actions of participants

B. The relevance of objects

C. The effect of the verbal action

In this way, the context of situation does provide a first approximation to the specification of the components of the communication situation and hence a step towards answering both the question "how is it that, in spite of a lack of perfect and consistent correlations between language and situation, the native speaker, given the text alone (a tape recording say) is often able, with a considerable degree of accuracy, to reconstruct the situation?" and conversely "given a situation, how does such a person produce language which is appropriate?" (Firth 1951).

This view of language as interaction, as use in context, requires that authentic language, not idealized language, be the object of the analysis. This is necessary in order to understand or interpret the uses to which the language is being put, since there is no direct correlation between form and function, except in highly ritualized functions such as greeting and leave-taking. This last point is more fully developed by Michael Halliday, a student of Firth, who is especially interested in the social functions of language and the way in which language fulfills these functions.

Halliday's work in systemic linguistics focuses on the second important concept in a functional approach to language teaching: *function*. (The term systemic linguistics is used to refer to Halliday's linguistic theory and will be explained more fully below.) In systemic theory, function has a dual status. It is referred to as both a micro- and a macro- concept. The micro-functions are those that a child learns in the early stages of language development. At the beginning, function is equivalent to *use* for the child in six broad functions, which Halliday observed in his son's development of English: the regulatory ("do as I tell you") function, the instrumental ("I want") function, the personal ("here I come") function, the imaginative ("let's pretend") function, the heuristic ("tell me why") function, and the interactional ("me and you") function (1973). As Halliday describes it, these micro-functions give way to the macro-functions as the child's language more closely approximates the adult system, a system which has only three, more abstract, functions. As the child learns to *combine* functions, he is able to speak about objects (and persons, places, etc.) while at the same time relating his attitude toward the listener,

this is, whether he expects some kind of response or not. These two kinds of meaning Halliday calls the *ideational* and *interpersonal* functions of language. These two functions in themselves, however, are not sufficient for the construction of texts, or discourse. A third function, the *textual* function, serves this purpose of language by providing means for the formation of coherent texts. Any linguistic unit is the simultaneous realization of these three functions.

Within the theory on the whole we can see these functions as serving language (1) to express "content," to give structure to experience and help to determine the speaker's way of looking at things (ideational); (2) to establish and maintain social relations, to delimit social groups, to identify and reinforce the individual (interpersonal); and (3) to provide for making links with itself and with features of the situation in which it is used, to enable the speaker (or writer) to construct passages of discourse that are situationally relevant (textual) (Halliday 1970). By providing a means of accounting for the complexities of language in actual use, Halliday's Firthian view of language and his view of function have informed the thinking of many concerned with language teaching, as we will see below.

The third concept offering a useful insight into language is *meaning potential.*

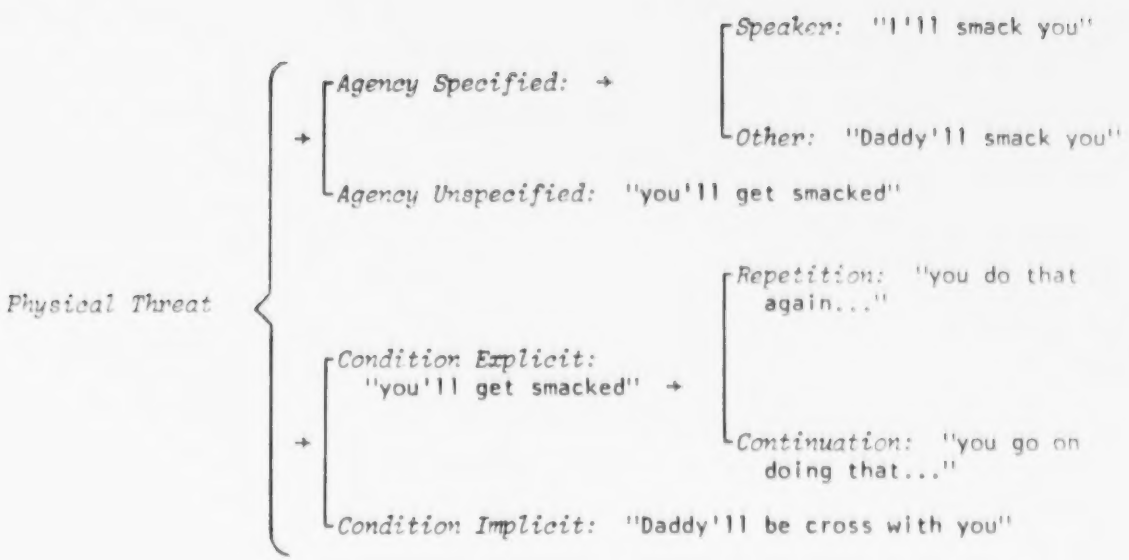
Halliday, like Firth before him, refuses to recognize any dichotomy between *knowing* (competence) and *doing* (performance) and sees them as inseparable. Meaning potential captures both the knowing and doing. The potential is what is available to the speaker, what is known. From the potential, choices are made for use of the language, for performing. This concept is seen as comprising what the speaker can *do* (in terms of choices in social behavior), what the speaker can *say* (in terms of the formal choices the language provides), and what the speaker can *mean* (which is related to the other two).

Meaning potential is an integral part of Hallliday's theory because it embodies the range of possibilities and open-ended sets of options in behavior that are available to the individual. These options can be organized into sets of options which form *systems*, the concept lending its name to systemic linguistics. System, as a technical term, specifies the potential in terms of the options and their relationship to one another. It can be represented schematically as:

$$a \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} x \\ y \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} m \\ n \end{bmatrix}$$

and read as follows: There are two systems, x/y and m/n, the first having entry condition a; if a is chosen (over not choosing anything at all), then the choice is between x and y; the system m/n has entry condition x; if x is chosen over y, then either m or n has to be chosen, and so on (Halliday 1973).

An example of how such a system works is an illustration from a "regulatory context" in which a parent and child are the participants. This is a semantic system, showing which possibilities are open to the parent in a situation of regulation, or control. The parent has opted for "physical threat" over doing (saying) nothing; the choice of physical threat is related to further choices, the systems of agency and condition, which are, in turn, the entry conditions for further choices:


Physical Threat
Agency Specified: →
Speaker: "I'll smack you"
Other: "Daddy'll smack you"
Agency Unspecified: "you'll get smacked"
Condition Explicit: "you'll get smacked" →
Repetition: "you do that again..."
Continuation: "you go on doing that..."
Condition Implicit: "Daddy'll be cross with you"

Although the system presented here is adapted and simplified (Halliday 1973), it illustrates what is involved in language use and specifically how the speaker begins with meaning, as in this case with the semantic option of a physical threat.

We come full circle when we consider the source of the semantic options, the social context. It is the social context which determines which behavior options, both verbal and non-verbal, are available to the speaker, for example, whether it is even appropriate in a given situation for the speaker to choose physical threat. It is the features of Firth's context of situation which would guide in the selection of options in the particular situation. These features include those on the level of meaning associated with the *context of culture*. This is the larger framework for the situations, the range of which is actually determined by the culture in which they occur. This implies that situations of control, for example, are not necessarily found across cultures and, therefore, that the related linguistic forms may serve different functions in another culture.

This concern with appropriacy and generalizability will become an important consideration as we examine and discuss language teaching materials and exercises.

SYSTEMIC LINGUISTICS AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Before moving on to a discussion of the practical application of the concepts, it is important to establish the relationship of systemic theory to communicative competence.

Halliday's meaning potential can be considered compatible with this concept if we follow Savignon's (1983) interpretation of communicative competence: the *expression*, *interpretation*, and *negotiation* of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons, or between one person and an oral or written text. This compatability is supported by Breen and Candlin's (1980) description of meaning potential as that which allows us to participate in a creative and meaning making process and to express or interpret the potential meanings within spoken or written discourse.

It is not to be inferred that the use of the term communicative competence in any way implies tacit acceptance of Chomsky's competence/performance distinction. Communicative competence as understood here reflects the sociological and linguistic insights of Hymes (1971) and Halliday (1978), both of whom reject the notion of linguistic rules divorced from social contexts.

APPLICATIONS OF SYSTEMIC/FUNCTIONAL THEORY

It is the job of the applied linguist to draw upon linguistic insights and apply them to areas of social concern where language is involved. Education and the teaching of languages is one such area. Systemic theory has proved to be a viable reference point for those linguists, e.g., Candlin, Widdowson, and Wilkins, among others, who have applied it to the teaching of English. Each of them has developed different areas of language teaching, but their similar theoretical heritage is evident in their work and provides a consistent frame of reference from which the models they propose can be evaluated.

Candlin's work (Candlin, Bruton and Leather 1976; Candlin 1979, 1981; Breen and Candlin 1980) ranges from the particular concerns of doctor-patient interaction for foreign doctors and their British patients to the specification of criteria for the development of communicative teaching materials. His more recent work has stressed the sociological as well as linguistic aspects of language learning. He sees the social conventions that govern language form and language behavior, for example, as central to the process of learning language for communication (Breen and Candlin 1980). Candlin also addresses the relationship of teacher responsibility and the social implications of communicative language teaching. The need for discoursal insights into human interaction, he points out, involves the teacher in the manipulation of human behavior (1977). The establishment of language norms is a particularly critical aspect of this issue. For example, the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of language varieties that some purists may consider substandard (Prator 1968) constitutes a challenge to the supremacy of mono-model language teaching and to existing norms of traditional education which are seen in terms of a set stock of information, simple skills and static conformity to a code.

Widdowson (1978) is another who has applied systemic theory to problems of language teaching. He is known for his work on materials for ESP (English for

Specific Purposes). His interest is in the teaching of discourse, not in the teaching of functions, with discourse seen as the process of deriving and creating meanings (ideational, interpersonal) through text. One well-known illustration of his approach is the coherence of the following exchange:

A: That's the telephone.

B: I'm in the bath.

C: OK.

He points out that while there are no grammatical markers to indicate the relationship of these utterances to one another, this brief exchange is accepted as coherent when a context is established.

In spite of the range and depth of the work of Candlin, Widdowson, and others, it is Wilkins' work which has had the greatest impact on current materials for language teaching. Wilkins was among a group of specialists faced with the task of providing the Council of Europe with an organized program for foreign language teaching in Western Europe. One of the first steps was an analysis of existing syllabus types (grammatical and situational), which Wilkins found to be wanting for the particular needs of this group of learners. In place of the existing syllabus types, Wilkins proposed a notional syllabus which would have a semantic and behavioral prediction of learner needs as its starting point (1976). "Notional" was to be understood in this context as meaning based, that is, this type of syllabus was to specify what the learners were to *do* with the language, what meanings they would need to communicate through language. In *Notional Syllabuses* there are three components of meaning: semantico-grammatical, modal, and communicative function. A notional syllabus would consider all three of these; a functional syllabus would consider the communicative functions alone but would then be "the weakest application" of his proposal (1976:68).[3]

The notional syllabus was to be an improvement over a situational syllabus, which is broken down into units with a heading, such as "At the post office." The problem with situational organization is that a language learner does not automatically generalize a grammatical lesson learned in such a unit to other situations (Ross 1981). In addition, it is unlikely that all the possible significant situations in which a learner would be likely to find himself could be listed.

A notional syllabus was also to be an improvement over a grammatical syllabus form. That is, a learner would not only learn the forms of the language, but would also learn forms as appropriate to his or her immediate needs. Rather than all of the forms of the language, only those forms would be learned that were relevant to the necessary functions, or uses, of language.

Wilkins' link to the British linguistic tradition is thus apparent in his stress on meaning and uses of language. It is the communicative functions that he considers his most original contribution to syllabus design; it is this variously

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[3]Wilkins' 1976 book is the synthesis of working documents for the Council of Europe and of conference papers written from 1972-1974.

defined concept that has had the most impact on language teaching and that has probably been the least understood.

Van Ek (1975), also a contributor to the Council of Europe project, used Wilkins' concept of a notional syllabus as a basis for the "threshold level," a specification of an elementary level in a unit/credit system for Europeans who from time to time have professional or personal contacts in European community countries. Van Ek's usage of the terms "function" and "notion" differ somewhat, however, from Wilkins'. In place of communicative function he specified language function, although referring essentially to the same kind of meaning, that is, what people *do* through language.[4]

Wilkins and Van Ek each had specific language teaching contexts and objectives in mind when they made their proposals. These proposals reflect one of the primary concerns of applied linguists in Europe--the need for a framework in meeting the demands of the rapid growth of foreign language learning and teaching in the context of the European community (Strevens 1981).[5]

NOTIONAL SYLLABUSES AND MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Wilkins' application of linguistic theory to syllabus design was accepted by teachers, administrators, publishers and materials writers. The result was, as already mentioned, an array of materials and publications claiming a functional base. In fact, due to its pervasiveness it has unfortunately become equated with communicative language teaching instead of rightfully being seen as *one* kind of proposal for syllabus design for a program which has the goal of developing communicative competence.

In 1964, Halliday et al., in writing about the applications of linguistic knowledge and insights to language teaching, saw writers of textbooks as one of the "consumers" of these applications. These consumers, they emphasized, should

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[4]*Notion* has two meanings in the Threshold Level, neither of which refers to an overriding principle as it does in *Notional Syllabuses*. Instead, there are general notions which refer to the "concepts which people use in verbal communication (1979:39)," for example, the property of space or the quality of importance. Specific notions are the particular lexical items relating to a topic. For example, under the topic of "personal identification," Van Ek lists *name*, *surname*, *address*, *telephone number* and *age* (1975:41).

These different usages may partially explain the confusion and misunderstanding reflected in materials and discussions of the functional approach to language teaching. These differences notwithstanding, Van Ek's work is important because it is the first concrete example of teaching objectives specified in notional terms for an actual group of learners.

[5]Specifications have also been completed for German (H. Baldegger et al. 1982. *Kontaktschwelle*. Munich: Langenscheidt.), French (D. Coste et al. 1976. *Un niveau seuil*. Strassbourg: Council of Europe.), and Spanish (P. Slagter. 1980. *Un nivel umbral*. Strassbourg: Council of Europe.).

clearly perceive and understand these applications since it is the nature and quality of textbooks which exert a powerful influence on the way the subject can develop. A look at the materials on the market reveals that not all textbook writers have always clearly perceived and understood these applications.

Those materials that claim a communicative and/or a functional base make their claims directly or indirectly: for example, "The functional approach of this material is based on the ideas of David Wilkins...," "The purpose of this text is the communicative function of language," "...meaningful interaction is facilitated by communicative uses (functions)," "The later units shift emphasis from a grammatical to a functional starting point," "Our teachers include Joos, Coulthard, Wilkins and van Ek...," "...the second part deals with the language appropriate to a particular *function*...," "...The communicative approach to language teaching is the fundamental concept of these materials." But making such claims is not enough, as some of the exercises that follow show.

Each of the following exercises is taken from a text that claims a functional base. While they share features that classify them as functional, we will find that they range from adequate to inadequate in their representation of the theoretical framework which their authors claim informs them.

If we accept the assumptions of systemic linguistics as viable for the linguistic base of communicative language teaching, we should be able to evaluate materials as communicative if they are consistent with these assumptions. By the same token, if functionally-based materials also claim to foster the development of communicative competence, they too should be subject to evaluation in the same manner.

In the following, the criteria applied in the evaluation of the adequacy of these exercises as representative of a functional and/or communicative approach are based on assumptions of systemic linguistics:

1. Utterances are presented with sufficient context for the interpretation of meaning.

2. The relevant contextual features are identifiable, that is, persons, objects, verbal and non-verbal behavior, and effect.

3. The insight gained into an instance of language use is generalizable, that is, the learner can make predictions/interpretations of meaning in similar situation types.

4. All three macro-functions are taken into account, that is, the ideational (conceptual), interpersonal (behavioral) and textual (formal).

5. Texts are authentic, that is, if not taken from original sources, they are believable as representations of actual use of English.

6. Options are provided for the expression and interpretation of meaning.

7. More than formulaic functions of language are illustrated.

8. The interdependency of formal and functional meaning in context is explicit as opposed to simple equivalency of form and function.

Of course, not all of these criteria are equally relevant for the five exercises below. There may also be criteria that are not given which would also reveal something about the adequacy or inadequacy of each selection as a representation of language as interaction. However, for the purpose of illustration, the discussion will be limited to those criteria listed. It should be noted at this point that one exercise or page from a set of materials is not necessarily representative of the complete set of materials. A critique should not be interpreted as judgment on an entire work, but rather as an illustration of how an exercise can be evaluated in terms of its usefulness in developing a learner's communicative competence.

EXAMPLES OF EXERCISES

ACCEPTING

1 KENJI: Do you think you'll be able to?
2 FRANCESCA: Yes. It sounds fine.
3 KENJI: That's great.
4 FRANCESCA: Thanks for asking me.
5 KENJI: You're welcome. I'm glad you can make it.
6 FRANCESCA: So am I.
7 KENJI: Okay. We'll see you then.
8 FRANCESCA: Right. I'm looking forward to it.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Francesca might be accepting:	*What else?*
a dinner invitation	a skiing invitation
a babysitting job	
a substitute-teaching job	
an invitation to meet his family	
a tennis date	
a ride in a car pool	

SOURCE: C. Akiyama, *Acceptance to Zeal* (New York, NY: Minerva Books, Ltd., 1981), p. 3.

Example #1

The dialog in Example #1 gives us no clue about the identity of Kenji and Francesca, other than their names. We do not know if they are peers and if so, we need to know their ages. And since Francesca is female, it might be helpful if the roles would be reversed to determine if the same forms are appropriate for males in "accepting." We can also raise the question about the appropriacy of females extending invitations, a form of behavior that may be acceptable in some contexts. (It seems to be the case in most examples of "inviting" that it is males who do "inviting," not women.)

Asking the students to provide for different "invitations" does not seem like an activity that helps in understanding why Francesca chooses the forms she does. It seems likely that forms chosen would depend upon just what it is she is accepting. For example, the appropriacy of the given dialog if Francesca is accepting a substitute teaching job is questionable.

The focus on the individual function of "accepting" directs the students' attention away from meaning in general and the *potential* meaning of a given form. Forms given are also representative of other semantic contexts, e.g., thanking. A line-by-line analysis might reveal that this exchange is exemplary of a number of functions, with the sum of the parts actually contributing little to the whole, that is "accepting."

The generalizability of these forms is also called into question for cultural reasons. In order to interpret the meaning more fully we need to know the cultural context of this exchange. If Kenji and Francesca are students in the U.S., the language presented is generally acceptable; if they are in Japan or Italy where English is learned as a foreign language or is used for international communication, the chances are that the language they use will differ in tone and form from that shown here.

By focusing on form as if it is identifiable with a particular function, this exercise misleads students and does not provide them with everything they need to know to *interpret* and *express* meaning effectively. This is a result of an inadequate representation of language as interaction.

In Example #2, "study these language functions" gives the impression that functions, like forms, need only to be studied sufficiently to be learned. If the learner does study these functions, what is to be gained? Are the guides "very formal" to "informal" generalizable? Context will determine the appropriacy of a formal form, yet formality is a relative term. Will a Chinese student who considers informality with one's professor an act of rudeness recognize a professor's informal forms as a gesture of friendship?

The form "That would be fine" may also serve in functions other than "accepting an invitation." It may be an expression of approval or of a choice. This entire chart illustrates the dangers of equating form and function and register as if such equivalences are reliable or even possible.

These exercises, it is pointed out, range in adequacy of representation of language as use, as interaction. Examples #1 and #2 seem sorely inadequate and even misleading. Example #3, however, provides a richer view of language.

HOW TO SAY IT

STUDY THESE LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS.

INVITING

	VERY FORMAL → → → →		INFORMAL
INVITING	Would you like to join me for coffee?	Would you like to go out for coffee?	Want to go out for coffee?
ACCEPTING INVITATIONS	Certainly. I'd like to very much.	Thank you. That would be nice.	Sure. (or) Okay.
ASKING FOR INFORMATION	When would you like to go?	When do you want to go?	When?
INVITING	Would after class be a good time?	Would after class be all right?	How about after class?
ACCEPTING AN INVITATION	That would be fine.	Fine.	Good. (or) Okay.
CONFIRMING AN INVITATION	So, we'll meet after class.	See you then.	See you.

SOURCE: J. Bodman and M. Lanzano, *Milk and Honey* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981), p. 83.

Example #2

FUNCTION: Asking people to do things.

4 i) Who says these things? In what situations?

a) It would help if you could hold the torch for me a second and I'll see if I can find it.	Hold.....?
b) I wonder if you could move your head a little. I can't see.	Could you.....?
c) I want you to run round and tell John to come back home immediately.	Run.....?
d) As it's raining, I thought you might collect him by car.	You couldn't.....?
e) What is the time? Mine's stopped.	Could you.....?
f) I like it better over there. Do me a favour and move it for me, dear.	Move.....?
g) I wonder if you could change it. I like to have a clean table-cloth.	You couldn't.....?
h) Let me borrow yours, George. I've only got a pencil.	Could I.....?

ii) Make new sentences using the words on the right.
iii) How do you think the other person replies? They don't say yes all the time. Maybe they can't help.

SOURCE: K. Morrow and K. Johnson, *Communicate 1* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 69.

Example #3

Part iii, for example, allows for the openness and unpredictability involved in actual speaking. The notion of someone's refusing to honor a request is entertained and the learner is called upon to formulate appropriate responses.

In 4 i) the learners are asked to define the situation and the participants, thus providing for consideration of the context of situation.

While these two features enhance the communicative nature of the exercise, there is one aspect that is troublesome in terms of generalizability. The language models are, I believe, distinctly British (upper?) middle class. It is very polite and well formed. The learners are asked to provide less formal forms, but there is no attention drawn to the differences in appropriate form over the appropriate form in terms of comforming behavior. Also, this exercise falls under the rubric "asking people to do things," yet is not necessarily a request. It may be a command or an example of "telling people to do things." The actual effect, or function, of each of these could only be determined by placing them in a text.

Example #4 illustrates the concept of choice and the effect of choices on the response of the next speaker. The interactive nature of language is conveyed by the form this exercise takes: the first student makes a choice from the two options given; another student makes an appropriate choice from 2, the first student, or yet a third student, chooses a response from 3, or even 2, it is theoretically possible that all choices be exhausted if the activity went on long enough and if utterances selected produced coherent discourse.

Since this exercise provides for the production of a coherent text with grammatically accurate forms provided, learners concentrate on meaning, not form, and perhaps in the process even express their own views about New York City. It thus appears very adequate as representative of the assumptions of systemic linguistics.

Problem-solving exercises such as Example #5 are becoming increasingly popular in language classes. They are a resonse to the need for learner-centered activities, but they are more than that. They provide the opportunity for learners to express meanings, using the meaning potential they have developed up to that time, about a specified content. Thus, the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language come together in the activity. In a problem-solving situation the learners also have to focus on meaning and have to contend with the possibility of not getting their meaning across. In addition, the unpredictability of discourse and the variable relationship between form and function are accented by this exercise. Due to these features, this exercise, if done without teacher intervention to correct errors (except those that are obstacles to the expression of meaning), provides for interaction among students to an optimal degree.

As this limited sample of exercises illustrates, the inclusion of what might be classified as a function in the title of a unit or exercise does not guarantee that the authors fully perceive what it means for language teaching to be communicative or that they fully understand the role of "function" in the interpretation and expression of meaning in a discourse.

CHATTER CHAIN: I WOULDN'T GO TO NEW YORK CITY

1 I wouldn't go to New York City for
a million dollars.

I'd love to go to New York City.

2 I sure would. I love big cities.

Why not? It's supposed to be
the most exciting city in the world.

Why?

Are you crazy? Don't you watch TV?
Not me. New York's full of gangsters.
I wouldn't. There's nothing to do there.
Me, too. My . . . says it's fantastic.

But big cities are | loud.
dirty.
ugly.
crowded.

3 New Yorkers are supposed to be the
unfriendliest people in the world.

You call | concrete skyscrapers traffic jams | exciting?

Do you believe everything | you see on TV?
you read?

New York is full of | interesting sights.
theaters.
stores.
museums.
interesting people.

That's not true.

(Because) I'd like to see | Harlem.
the U.N.
the World Trade Center.
the Empire State Building.
Central Park.

SOURCE: H.E. Piepho et al., *Contacts* Bochum, W. Germany: Ferdinand Kamp, 1979), p. 8.

Example #4

While you are driving alone through the desert on vacation, your camper breaks down late in the afternoon, and you cannot fix it. You discover that the road you are traveling on is closed to traffic. There is little hope of anyone driving by to help you. There are no telephones nearby.

Your best solution is to walk back to a service station which you remember passing. You calculate that you have driven about one hour and fifteen minutes at an average speed of eighty kilometers (fifty miles) per hour. You will have to travel only at night because of the intense heat and burning sun.

The camper has the following items in it:

- roll of toilet paper
- mess kit
- dozen eggs
- box of powdered milk
- canteen of water
- sleeping bag
- book of matches
- dozen flares
- portable radio
- wool blanket
- can of gas
- first-aid kit
- large utility knife
- insect repellent
- tent
- flare gun
- flashlight
- thermos of hot coffee
- camping stove
- compass
- fresh vegetables
- beach umbrella
- fresh fruit
- canned food
- can opener

ORAL INTERACTION

1 Because of the limitations of space and weight, you can only carry five items.

   a. Decide which five items to take.
   b. Arrange these five items in order of importance.

2 Most of the items in the camper can fit into two categories: (1) camping gear, and (2) food. Put these items into their categories.

3 Calculate the distance and the approximate amount of time needed to walk that distance.

4 What other alternatives are there for solving this situation, other than walking back to the service station?

5 Can you think of any items missing from the list that you might need? Name them.

SOURCE: D. Byrd and I. Clemente-Cabetas, *React/Interact* (New York, NY: Regents, 1980), p. 23.

Example #5

CONCLUSION

If language as interaction, and all it implies, is not taken into account, materials will continue to fall short of developing a learner's communicative competence. While both the functional aspect of language and the formal features of language are necessary considerations in determining what to teach, they are not sufficient. It is *context* that gives meaning to form and function and makes it possible for us to make any sense out of any instance of language.

Systemic linguistics provides a framework for integrating these components of language use. Application of the insights this view of language provides not only has consequences for materials development as has been illustrated here, but also has implications for other areas which touch upon communicative language teaching such as techniques, methods, and teacher training. A theoretical base which can serve as a point of reference in our attempts to develop learners' communicative competence is available; we need only to exploit it.

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